(v) Encouragement to participation of pvt./joint venture companies in exploration activities.

(vi) Operationalisation of New Exploration Licensing Policy to encourage exploration activities.

(vii) Implementation of new projects/schemes for additional development of existing fields/ development of new fields.

Purchase of Oil Fields by ONGC and IOC

*140. SHRI K. KALAVENKATA RAO:
SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether ONGC and IOC propose to buy oil fields, rigs abroad;

(b) if so, the strategy proposed in this regard;

(c) whether this is essential because of the negative growth rate of crude oil production in the country; and

(d) if so, what are the details of this plan?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI K. RAMAMURTHY): (a) to (d) Acquisition of equity oil abroad is one of the objectives pursued by the two companies. This is also an important plank of Government's strategy to achieve oil security. The specific investment proposals would depend on size of opportunity, its possible potential, availability of infrastructure and other operational aspects. Possibilities exist in Kazakhastan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia etc.

There is, however, no plan of ONGC to buy drilling rigs abroad.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Cigarette Consumption

931. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA': Will the PRIME MINISTER Be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the cigarette consumption has gone down in the country during 1998-99;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) does Government propose to fasten this decline;

(d) if so, in what manner; and

(e) whether there is any relationship between the rates and the consumption of cigarettes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (e) The material is being collected from the various Ministries/Departments and reply will be placed on the table of the House.

New Policy for Small Farmers

932. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a new policy affecting marginal and small farmers is on the anvil;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if answer to (b) above be in the negative, whether it is proposed to offer them any special package of reliefs and incentives, and if so, the details of the same?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (c) A National Policy on Agriculture to promote environmentally non-degrading, technically sound, economically viable and socially acceptable improvement of natural resources to promote sustainable development of agriculture is in the final stages of drafting. The Policy will spell out in the context of agro-climatic and